



# The State Education Agency: The Chief Learning Organization - Lessons From the Rhode Island Department of Education

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The State Education Agency: The Chief Learning Organization

Lessons from the Rhode Island Department of Education

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)  
Capstone

Submitted by

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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements for the degree of  
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To the three woman who have made me the man I am today,

And have laid the foundation for who I will become....

Erica Newell (my best friend and life partner)

Mary Newell (my devoted and loving mother)

Carolyn Akers (my intrepid mentor)



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## **Abstract**

In a post Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind environment, state education agencies (SEA's) play an increasing role in influencing the policy and practices of schools and districts. Yet, the challenges of SEA's are monumental. American students continue to be outperformed by their international peers. Schools and districts across America are struggling to make any headway on the persistent achievement gaps for poor and minority students. The system is in crisis, and the solutions are unknown. To meet this challenge of imagination, ingenuity, and learning, SEA's must pivot from a predominantly compliance-oriented, highly bureaucratic culture to a more nimble learning-oriented approach. The central question is how can the SEA become a learning organization?

Drawing from research on enabling learning in organizations, developing effective teams, and promoting adult development, I argue that by developing an internal, learning-oriented team that leads the organization's efforts to learn and by engaging with statewide stakeholders- defined as educators, parents, business, community leaders, and students, the SEA will shift its orientation to learning. In this capstone, I describe my efforts at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to support this pivot to a learning organization through the design and facilitation of a community-driven, design-thinking based strategic planning process that asks stakeholders to learn from each other,



national experts, and RIDE staff and to translate that learning into a collaboratively defined statewide vision and strategy for public education. Furthermore, I describe RIDE's efforts to learn from and enact this strategic plan.

Analysis of this capstone reveals three key insights: (1) taking the time to build broad-based support for a statewide educational strategy matters greatly to building legitimacy and long-term sustainability; (2) despite their traditional compliance-oriented roles, SEA's can form nimble learning oriented teams that impel learning throughout the entire organization; and (3) SEA's can best shift their role through an open dialogue of continuous improvement that happens both within the agency and across the state.

## **Introduction**

### *The Overview*

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) stands as a national innovator in the role of state education agencies (SEAs). Over the last five years, RIDE has developed a national reputation for progressive policy and practices through its acceleration of competency-based learning, technology rich instruction, Pre-k school expansion, and teacher effectiveness efforts. Over this time, many national education reform strategies including Race to the Top, No Child Left Behind, teacher evaluation, School Improvement Grants (SIG), and pro-charter movements have created a cacophony of approaches and polarizing political fallout across the United States. Rhode Island has not been immune to this national trend. Given these political conditions, as well as the reality of persistent achievement gaps among low-income and minority students and America's continuous decline in performance when compared to their international peers, SEAs like RIDE are facing the same question – how can it lead its state to a truly transformative vision for public education and then develop a strategy to achieve that vision which has the support of statewide constituents? This is a challenge of both technical know-how and political will.

While RIDE may have neither the silver bullet answers, nor the complete authority to transform public education in Rhode Island, it is clear that RIDE must play a critical role as a catalyst for change. In this capstone, I make the following argument: For

SEAs to become catalysts for transforming public education in their states, they must first organize themselves to be learning organizations. By learning organizations, I mean an agency that is focused on exploring solutions, enabling best practices among schools, and scaling testable solutions. To be a learning organization, the staff must embody a spirit of collaboration, inquiry, and imagination. Furthermore, it is not enough to say that the staff learns from itself internally. The SEA as a learning organization must privilege learning from its constituencies across the state, as well as nationally and internationally. Only then can solutions to the complex education challenges facing states be identified and the public will to enact them be garnered.

### *The Task*

I began my residency at RIDE during the summer of 2014. The state was in a place of significant transition as a new governor's race was heating up. The state Commissioner of Education, Deborah Gist, was entering the beginning of her fifth and final year of her contract with the likelihood of her contract renewal unknown. RIDE as an organization was recovering from a state legislative session that had just ended in June, in which lawmakers passed a series of measures that effectively halted many of its major strategic initiatives. Following some public outcry on the use of graduation exams as a requirement for graduation, legislators placed a moratorium on the use of testing as a consideration for graduation until 2017. This effectively discontinued a key component of what RIDE called the "Diploma System". Secondly, the General Assembly passed a bill

that required highly effective teachers to be evaluated on only two or three year cycles, instead of annually. Since the vast majority of teachers in Rhode Island were rated as highly effective, this arrested many of RIDE's efforts to ensure teacher evaluation was linked to student performance annually. Lastly, the General Assembly passed a bill that created a separate oversight board for career and technical education.

With this moment of significant challenge, it was clear that for RIDE to lead with vision, it must be open to taking a different approach. It is with this context that I began my work at RIDE. I entered the organization with a number of potential opportunities to promote learning and build teams within the organization. Over the course of the first four months of my residency, I moved from being a relatively neutral designer of learning and teaming in many contexts within the agency to the co-facilitator of the state's five-year strategic planning process.

This capstone describes my efforts to support RIDE in becoming a learning organization through the development of a publicly-led strategic planning process designed to result in a widely-held vision and strategy for transforming public education in Rhode Island. It begins with a "Review of Knowledge for Action" that identifies the major research undergirding the development of RIDE as a learning organization and the strategic planning process specifically. It then describes the details of the strategic planning process implementation, preliminary results from the effort, and analysis of the

project with insights for my leadership, recommendations for the Rhode Island Department of Education, and broader implications for the education sector.

### **Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA)**

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) has been among the nation's leaders in the reform of State Education Agencies (SEAs) over the last five years. With the recruitment of Deborah Gist, former State Superintendent of Education for Washington, D.C., Rhode Island has been a national example of progressive momentum promoted by the Obama Administration and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. In just five years, RIDE has won both a Race to the Top grant and a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant. It has instituted the first annual teacher and administrator evaluation system in the state's history, implemented accountability for schools that includes student growth and closing achievement gaps, moved to one of the nation's most pure "funding-follows-the-student" statewide funding formulas based on district capacity and student need, invested in robust data systems to give actionable data to teachers and the public, and innovated in the use of technology at the classroom level. As a result of these reforms, the national advocacy organization StudentsFirst ranked RIDE as #4 in the country for having the right policy environment in place to best raise academic levels.

Yet, making such remarkable progress has not come without its costs. The relentless focus on implementing RIDE priority reforms connected to its Race to the Top

(RTT) application has caused a de-prioritization of other critical work not funded by RTT in the agency. SEA staff members have been tasked with the responsibility of taking a statewide leadership position on such challenging work as charter school authorization, school turnaround, federal Title 1 reform, developing 21<sup>st</sup> century career and college ready schools; yet, SEA staff are asked to create the conditions for success for districts in these areas without having the “answers” themselves. Furthermore, the traditional bureaucratic structures of the SEA inhibit staff from shifting the organizational focus to that of learning *and* doing simultaneously.

The charge of my strategic project is to enable RIDE to become a learning organization by facilitating a diverse team of stakeholders to develop the strategic priorities of the organization. Aligned with this charge are two questions (1) what does research suggest are the critical components to building the capacity of SEA’s and (2) what SEA implications can be drawn from the research on building a learning organization?

*Research Question #1: What does prior research suggest are the critical components to building the capacity of SEAs?*

Relatively little research or writing has been done on the topic of building SEA capacity. The work of such organizations as the Center for American Progress, American Enterprise Institute, Center of Education Policy, and the Center of Re-inventing Public

Education stand out as beacons of direction in an otherwise quiet area of education research. The essential lessons from these research revolve around how the SEA has gotten to its current role and what needs to change for it to be most effective in its role. Very few references are even made about SEA's in the annals of American K-12 history before 1965. It wasn't until the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) Act that federal funding for public schools became a serious reality and, in turn, called upon the SEA to strengthen itself so that it could administrate these new federal dollars for education. By the 1970's, SEAs began creating state education policy; until then they lacked the infrastructure and capacity to serve as a policymaking and enforcement body for education in their state (Manna, 2006). In fact, Title V of ESEA provided explicit funding for building the administrative capacity of state departments of education to best administer the ESEA law. Over time, SEAs major purpose became dispersing federal dollars, with a percentage of those dollars funding much of the staff in the agency. Their focus was on federal compliance and regulation, rather than establishing a coherent strategy for public education in their state (Brown et al, 2011).

In the early 1990's, the role of the SEA began to shift again with the introduction of standards-based reform. This culminated in 1994's Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA - Improving America's Schools) during that same year (Rhim, Hassell, & Redding, 2007).

With this shift, states then entered the business of setting state standards for student performance and implementing state assessments to determine progress on these standards. This role was significantly accelerated with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001.

The reauthorization of ESEA under President George W. Bush brought about a new level of expectations for SEAs. This plan required state-based standards, testing and reporting of all sub-groups of students in Math and Reading, and enforced consequential accountability structures for schools and districts. To meet these requirements, SEAs had to adjust their previous compliance posture into one that accommodated data collection and accountability over schools and districts. Yet, these agencies were woefully underprepared to meet this challenge. In 2007, in discussing SEAs, UCLA's Gail Sunderman and Gary Orfield wrote in *Phi Delta Kappan* of the "striking lack of resources and knowledge needed to accomplish [NCLB's] extraordinary goals" (Sunderman & Orfield, 2007). The seriousness of the plight of SEA's can be summed up in Marc Tucker and Thomas Toch's anecdote of the 1,452 person California Department of Education in 2004.

"With a payroll of 1,452, it's a sizable agency. But it is hardly a leviathan, considering it manages 41 percent of California's core budget and is responsible for overseeing a system that educates one out of



seven American school children. Moreover, the vast majority of those 1,452 employees spend their days in activities that have little or nothing to do with school reform. One hundred and fifty-five finance experts, for example, share the second floor with 144 special-education regulators; there is a whole division of lawyers, a team to draft safety standards for school buses, and many technologists. Sequestered in a section of the fourth floor are the 100 or so statisticians, experts in school leadership and others--about 7 percent of the department's staff--in charge of the department's most important work under NCLB: identifying and turning around California public schools that are failing to educate their students effectively. And California has a far bigger school reform staff than almost any other state.” (Tucker & Toch, 2004)

Taking California’s example as illustrative of the norm, it is clear that SEA’s faced both a serious lack of capacity for their new role both in terms of the number of people available to do the work and the kinds of people who were working in the agencies.

The Obama administration’s Race to the Top initiative sought to address this challenge by providing funding to SEAs for committing to a bold policy polemic that required, among other things, that they increase their internal capacity in areas that included reforming educator evaluation systems, developing common core standards,

supporting struggling students, and piloting student assessment and data systems. It was an attempt to build SEA capacity and expand the role of SEAs to provide support and technical assistance. Forty states applied, and nineteen states were funded for \$4.35 billion in grant funding to accelerate their progress. While a significant catalyst, the RTT funding was only temporary and revealed a larger, long-term challenge to building state capacity (i.e. What will happen after the money has been used up?). Given this context, a few key considerations for building long-term state capacity emerge from the research.

- **The Role of the Leader:** The Chief State School Officer (CSSO) must see his/her job as serving as a change agent for public education in the state, pushing the envelope of change and innovation. This observation is rooted in the literature of business and leadership that underscore the critical role the CEO, or in this case the CSSO, plays in enabling an organization or company to innovate and improve (Christensen & Raynor, 2003).
- **The Clarity of the Strategy:** SEAs must operate with a coherent strategy that includes a clear theory of action, decisions on what the organization must focus upon, and the allocation of resources to support this strategy (Porter, 1996).
- **The Freedom to Operate:** SEAs must be given the flexibility to hire, fire, and compensate their employees so that high-quality talent can be attracted and retained in their agencies (Brown et al, 2011).

- **The Need to Engage Partners:** With limited staffing and geographic reach, SDE's can never directly improve the thousands of schools in their states. To meet their goals, they must develop strong partnerships with local school districts, charter providers, higher education institutions, the state legislature, governors, and other public and private stakeholders (Brown et al, 2011).
- **The Ability to Measure Progress:** The SDE's role of establishing a statewide strategy for education is ultimately limited by its ability to develop state accountability systems and use them to measure district performance and to inform that state's strategy over time. SDE's must invest through governmental and philanthropic dollars in their ability to gather, track, and transparently report robust data on schools, districts, and students (Murphy & Hill, 2012).

These considerations exist outside of the core content of the work of the SEA. These areas setup the enabling conditions for SEAs to tackle such content as teacher evaluation or school turnaround in collaboration with partners and in the service of schools. One could think of these key elements as central to any and all aspects of the changing role of the SEA from compliance-oriented to district capacity building. It is important to note that each of these key elements is significantly different from the other. They should be seen as concomitant elements that are each essential pieces of the puzzle to helping SEA's shift roles from compliance-oriented to capacity builders. Yet, the reality remains

that SEAs cannot possibly build their districts' capacities around such complex topics as school turnaround, educator evaluation, and common core standards if they have not built some level of expertise around the content internally. In short, the SEA must learn itself, to shift its role effectively from compliance-oriented to capacity builder. This realization brings us to our second research question.

*Research Question #2: What SEA implications can be drawn from the body of knowledge on building a learning organization?*

Why move from discussing the core elements of building SEA capacity to discussing building a learning organization? The answer lies in an observation on strategy by Rachel Curtis and Liz City. They wrote, "Strategy will never be implemented nor vision realized without collaboration and teamwork. Strategy doesn't just happen. People working in teams make it happen" (Curtis & City, 2012, p. 38). Thus, as important as *what* the SEA should focus on to make the shift from a bureaucratic, compliance-oriented organization to a more nimble, learning-focused, service-oriented organization, the discussion must begin with the realization that the SEA must attend to *who* will be making the shift. This observation is made to punctuate the reality that the strategic pivoting of the role of the SEA can never happen unless care is taken to support the individual staff's capacity to understand the shift, value the need for the shift, and embrace the eventual changes to their daily routines and sense of identity that will

become an inexorable result. Furthermore, this shift does not happen solely by internal staff. It requires the SEA look outside its own walls to learn from and empower best practices and approaches across its state. In short, my contention is simple- for LEAs to transform their outcomes and meet the needs of all students, SEAs must help them build their capacity. Yet, SEAs cannot build LEAs capacity without first building their own capacity through a strong learning orientation.

### The Principles of Adult Learning

The task of helping adults make a shift in their practice is both an adaptive challenge (Heiftiz & Linsky, 2002) and an adult development challenge. This is in part because the way an individual responds to change is directly related to how he/she views himself. Principles of adult development provide insight into the common understanding of how adults develop. Bob Kegan's (1984, 1994, 2000) constructivist-developmental theory focuses on two fundamental ideas (1) we are constantly making sense of our experiences and constructing meaning through them and (2) the way we make meaning and ascribe importance to our experiences grows in increasing complexity over time. These observations underscore the reality that adults develop over time. Furthermore, adults develop in fairly predictable ways. Building off Kegan's work, Ellie Drago-Serverson (2008) described this development in three phases: instrumental (focused on what I can get), socialized (focused on how I can please others), and self-authoring

(focused on my personal sense of right and wrong). She then recommended the strategies of teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring as “Four Pillar Practices” to encourage adult development. It is noteworthy that Drago-Severson begins with teaming as the foundational practice. In her research she found, “Working in teams creates a safe place for adults to share perspectives and challenge each other’s thinking and provides a context for growth.” (Drago-Severson, 2008, p.62).

### Teaming To Build Learning Organizations

Why is teaming such a crucial strategy for adult development in organizations? The research of Amy Edmonson (2012) points to the need for organizations to “organize to learn” as well as “organize to execute”. Edmonson found in her study of business that “to excel in a complex and uncertain business environment, people need to both work *and* learn together” (Edmondson, 2012, p. 1). She calls this concept “execution as learning”. Her empirical observation from the business sector is that the managerial bias towards execution can actually inhibit the organization’s ability to learn and innovate. This conundrum exists because a focus on getting things done can crowd out the necessary reflection and experimentation needed to excel in an uncertain and complex business environment. In her concept of execution as learning, she describes how organizations can balance learning with high performance, both of which are required to ensure an organization excels. As management and systems expert Peter Senge wrote,

“The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap into people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization” (Senge, 1990, p.4).

This research brings me to my first implication. Namely, *the development of teams is a crucial condition of adult learning, and without adult learning, organizational learning is impossible*. Senge (1990) put it this way, “Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs” (p.139). Why does this matter for the SEA? If the SEA does not become a learning organization, it will not be able to successfully shift its role in the face of a rapidly changing and uncertain public education environment. Figure 1 summarizes the logic behind teaming as an entry point to shifting the role of the SEA.

**Figure 1: From Teaming to Shifting the Role of the SEA**



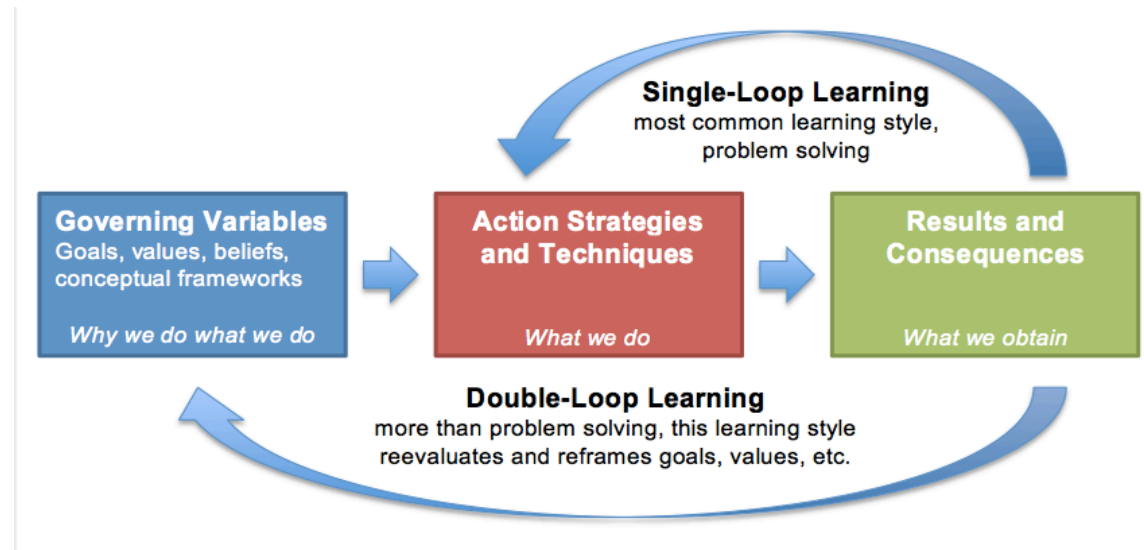
## Enabling Double-Loop Learning

The focus on learning through teaming is not meant to be an attempt to promote learning for learning's sake. On the contrary, the kind of learning that is needed is one that facilitates organizational change. Business school literature produces some of the most important insights on this topic. The work of Chris Argyris and Donald Schon is of seminal importance (1978, 1996). Their theory of double-loop learning stands out as an important foundation for effective change. It finds that learning-oriented organizations must challenge their own norms, values and processes. According to their research, teams that (1) emphasize common goals and mutual influence, (2) encourage open communication, (3) publically test assumptions and beliefs, and (4) combine advocacy with inquiry will become more effective learning organizations. This is contrasted with the default action of single-loop learning where the organization takes an action, collects feedback on how effective the action was, and then tries a different approach. As applied to organizations such as SEA's, this single-loop learning is insufficient to promote a significant and sustainable change in culture. The point is that organizations that demonstrate double loop learning create the conditions so that they challenge the fundamental beliefs that undergird how and why they act. This lesson brings me to my second implication. Namely, *for SEA's to truly pivot to capacity-building entities in states, they must be prepared to reevaluate and reframe their goals, priorities, and values*



*by listening and acting upon the feedback of their statewide constituencies (parents, teachers, schools, union, etc).*

**Figure 2: Double-Loop Learning vs. Single –Loop Learning**



### Executing A High Quality Teaming Strategy

Still, the question remains, if implementing teaming is a critical entry point for SEA role shifting, what does research suggest are best practices in high quality teaming? To create and sustain a team that truly works collaboratively, the literature suggests there are best practices for starting, structuring, and maintaining teams.

- **Attending to the stages of teaming matters:** Tuckman and Jensen (1977) find that teams go through a predictable set of stages (forming, storming, norming,

performing, and adjourning). As a best practice, team members should understand this reality and make explicit this natural progression as a way to produce open, honest dialogue and build trust among the team.

- **Team practices matter:** Gratton and Erickson (2007) find that eight practices make the difference for creating strong learning-oriented teams: investing in relationship practices, modeling collaboration, creating a gifting culture, ensuring the requisite skills are within the team, building community, assigning team leaders who are both task and relationship oriented, building upon preexisting relationships, and, finally, clarifying roles while also allowing space for the task to be refined.
- **Team structure matters:** Clark and Wheelwright (1992) identify functional, lightweight, heavyweight, and autonomous teams as different kinds of team structures that could be employed. These teams increase from minimum agency and authority to full authority to make all decisions. These choices of team structure are based upon what the charge of the team might be and how to best accomplish the task.
- **Communication Matters:** Pentland (2012) finds that how teams communicate is as important as what they communicate. The energy, creativity, and mutual respect within teams can actually be measured, and those teams with strong and inclusive cultures are also the most productive teams.

While it's important to know what practices matter most within teams for setting the conditions for success, it is equally important to know how facilitative leaders enable these practices to exist. The work of Sam Kaner et al. on participatory decision making reveals that the mission of facilitators in developing a team's capacity to make decisions and participate in their own shared and sustainable decision making is to (1) encourage full participation, (2) promote mutual understanding, (3) foster inclusive solutions, and (4) cultivate shared responsibility (Kaner et al., 2014). These findings bring me to my third implication. Namely, the role of the facilitator is to *establishing team processes, structures, and communication channels that will encourage the group to bolster their ability to effectively participate in decision-making*. To be a true team, individuals must be setup to share responsibility, communicate authentically, and have the right level of autonomy so that they can grow, learn, and execute effectively.

#### *A theory of action for RIDE*

The findings of the research in this review of knowledge for action identify a few key facts:

1. SEA's are facing a new environment in which they are expected to lead the solution generating for public schools statewide. Yet, they lack the structure, expertise or capacity to fill this role. Instead, they are stuck in the bureaucracies that have been the residual effect of their initial roles as conduits for federal

funds.

2. To help make this shift, SEA's must attend to the adaptive challenges of becoming a learning organization.
3. Becoming a learning organization requires adults to understand their own development and be willing to grow themselves.
4. Effective learning happens through a "double-loop" which forces the organization to challenge and reframe its values, priorities, and actions in concert with communities, school districts, the federal government, and educational experts.
5. Teaming is a critical tool by which individuals and organizations learn and is inhibited by effective facilitation that leads to participatory decision-making

With these five facts in mind, my theory of action for my strategic project is as follows:

*If I, as a member of the RIDE strategic planning team, engage RIDE leadership and staff in reflecting upon "why" the agency exists as well as the successes and lessons of the current strategic plan, and if we as a strategic planning team use these lessons to design a strategic planning process that includes the broader Rhode Island public in setting educational priorities, then RIDE will develop a strategic plan that is based upon the best thinking of the state, commands broad-based public support, and promotes RIDE's continuous learning.*

**Strategic Project**

## Description

My strategic project has taken on four phases over the last 10 months. Phase 1 included facilitating the small, internal RIDE strategic planning team. In Phase 2, I helped design a process for the RIDE internal staff to reflect upon the lessons of the last five-year efforts and focus on the future priorities of the agency. In Phase 3, I helped to design a RIDE strategic planning process that turned over the writing of the plan to community stakeholders. Finally, in Phase 4, I took on greater leadership of the process by serving as the co-facilitator of this community writing team and leading them in the development of statewide values, priorities, and strategies for education. Figure 3 summarizes the stages of the project.

**Figure 3: Phases of the Strategic Project**



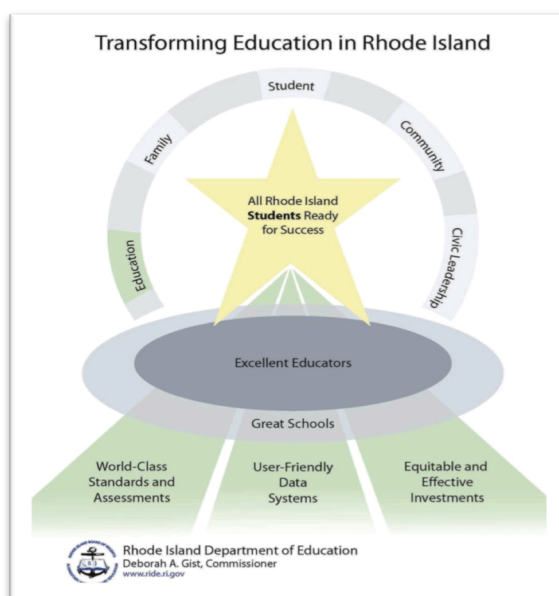
### *Background on the Previous Plan*

In 2009, Deborah A. Gist, Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education stated, *“If America is going to lead the world in the 21st century, America’s schools must lead the world. And Rhode Island’s schools can and will be a*

*leader among them. And that responsibility for creating the world's best schools lies squarely on our shoulders” - Remarks of Commissioner Gist upon her appointment, State House, April 2, 2009.*

To realize this challenge, she and her team developed the first strategic plan for Rhode Island public education in decades. Titled *2010-2015 Transforming Education in Rhode Island Strategic Plan*, this document laid out five strategic priorities including (1) ensure educator excellence, (2) accelerate all schools toward greatness, (3) establish world-class standards and assessments, (4) develop user-friendly data systems, (5) invest our resources wisely, and a overarching vision for public education (see figure 4).

**Figure 4: Vision for Transforming Education**



It was written by the Commissioner and her staff and then shared with constituencies

throughout the state. The result was a nationally heralded plan based upon best practices from across the country. Yet, in Rhode Island, it was largely considered the Commissioner's plan, not the state's plan. Furthermore, this plan was written closely to the goals of Race to the Top. In fact, over the last five years, it has become synonymous with the state's Race to the Top efforts both externally and internally. This tension has created increased dissension and pressure from local school districts, the state teacher's union, superintendent associations, and the general assembly to undue and intervene in aspects of the plan that are seen as unpopular or controversial by some. Though RIDE has successfully implemented the key initiatives of the plan such as teacher quality, standards and assessments, funding formula, data systems and accountability, it has not seen the large scale district and legislative cooperation to take advantage of these reforms and translate them into true progress at the local level. On the contrary, districts, unions, and members of the General Assembly have directly opposed many of these efforts, and even successfully lobbied to pass legislation in June 2014 to stall efforts on high school graduation testing, educator annual evaluations, and direct agency oversight of Career Technical Education. Why was there such a lack of support? Among many reasons, a primary driver for this reality was that the state's educators, leaders, and the broader public did not own the plan. It was not the state of Rhode Island's plan. It was the Commissioner's Plan. It was Rhode Island's Race to the Top's Plan. Thus, bold initiatives lacked the political support and legitimacy to withstand the opposition of the

well-established power structure. One lesson was abundantly clear to the agency's leadership- the next approach to strategic planning needed to take a different, more inclusive approach. This next plan needed to be embraced as the state's plan.

### *Phase 1: Building the Leadership Team*

In the spring of 2014, RIDE leadership began to envision a strategic planning process that was iterative and inclusive. Taking lessons for the field of design thinking, the core idea of this plan was to develop a series of rapidly developed ideas and share them out to the public for feedback. Over time, the writers, comprised of some RIDE and some community members, would then improve upon their ideas based upon the feedback. The theory was that this approach would ensure each draft was stronger as a result of this feedback and that community buy-in would increase as a result of their engagement in the process.

In July 2014, I entered RIDE as a Fellow/Resident and among many other job responsibilities, began to serve on an internal team charged by the Commissioner and led by the Chief of Efficiencies and Fiscal Integrity with the task of designing and leading RIDE's strategic planning process. In this early phase, my primary role was as facilitator of the internal team. It was the ideal place to practice my theory of creating an effective team that then enabled broader organizational learning. My goal was to build a team that trusted and supported one another personally and professionally, engaged in collaborative



and open inquiry and design, and balanced strategic thinking with tactical implementation. I created explicit structures and routines in our meeting agenda that enabled these teaming conditions to be met. For instance, each agenda included a time to check-in on both professional and personal updates. It included a separation of tactical agenda topics (those requiring immediate decision) and strategic agenda topics that required more design and development time. Roles in meetings were shared freely across the group, and each meeting ended with appreciations and a process check protocol where the group reflected on how we collectively balanced task, process, and relationships. These efforts created a psychologically safe, learning-oriented team. Even as additional team members were added, the healthy culture was only strengthened because of the firm foundation.

### *Phase 2: Fostering Agency Learning*

In the summer of 2014, RIDE leadership, including the Adaptive Leadership Team (ALT), which was made up the Commissioner's direct reports, as well as agency Directors began to engage in an process of getting clear about the strategic future focus of RIDE. The central question for the agency leadership was based upon the lessons of the last five years, what role should RIDE play in the future to lead public education in Rhode Island. My fellow members of strategic planning team members and I developed specific ways for the agency to begin to hear each other's beliefs about that question. We first developed surveys for RIDE leadership that asked them to share the most important

roles, priorities, and non-negotiable work that should continue in the next five years. To follow up on these survey comments, researchers from the Northeastern Comprehensive Center conducted individual staff interviews with the leadership team to further explore the individual beliefs of RIDE leadership. These interviews revealed enlightening areas of commonalities and difference among RIDE leaders about the future of agency. We then used these data to plan and host an ALT, Directors and staff retreat in September 2014 that helped anchor the internal perspectives of RIDE as a basis for external strategic plan engagement and as a way of launching the agency as a whole into strategic planning efforts.

### *Phase 3: Engaging External Stakeholders – Handing over the Writing of the Plan*

While the internal efforts engaged the RIDE community in strategic planning, it did little to attend to the core lessons from the last five-year strategic plan, namely that RIDE couldn't transform public schools on its own. Success for RIDE's statewide education strategies required the collaboration of schools, communities as well as state legislative support. If not done radically different, RIDE would once again write a plan for which the state was expected to buy in. Both the Commissioner and Board of Education were committed to learning from the lessons of the previous strategic plan and helping the agency move to an inclusive approach, one that made the priorities for public education the responsibility of the entire state and not just one organization. We collaborated to design just such an inclusive process. We then shared this design with, the Commissioner

and ALT, and she ultimately garnered the support of the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education (Council), the statewide educational governance body for Pre-K through 12 education in Rhode Island. To that end, in the fall of 2014, the Council formally announced the launch of our strategic planning design and heralded it as a new kind of strategic planning process that was groundbreaking for the work of SEAs nationally (See Appendix A for related Associated Press Articles). The goals of the strategic planning process included the following: (1) facilitate an aspirational and far-reaching statewide conversation about public education; (2) expand our current work to accommodate new perspectives and emerging opportunities; (3) create an intentional transition between the old and new strategic plans; (4) identify unifying content around which Rhode Islanders can rally; (5) set an ambitious, actionable, measurable, and focused five-year vision for the future of public education in Rhode Island; and (6) connect education to other statewide planning initiatives to ensure economic, social service, and workforce development alignment.

To achieve these goals, the strategic plan included three stages. Figure 5 summarizes the key aspects of each of these phases.

**Figure 5: Stages of Rhode Island’s Strategic Planning Process**



**Stage 1: Convene a Statewide Conversation: October 2014 – April 2015**

*Invite thousands of Rhode Islanders to discuss the future of public education*

Contributions to this conversation range from thousands of individual surveys to facilitated intimate living-room discussions, all with the goal of understanding the beliefs and goals for public education across Rhode Island.



**Stage 2: Convert the Conversation to Action: November 2014 – May 2015**

*Recruit, select, and prepare the “Ambassador Design Team”*

A representative community will work directly with the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to develop the strategic plan. This team will publish three prototypes for community feedback prior to the final draft.



**Stage 3: Launch a Statewide PK-12 Plan: June 2015**

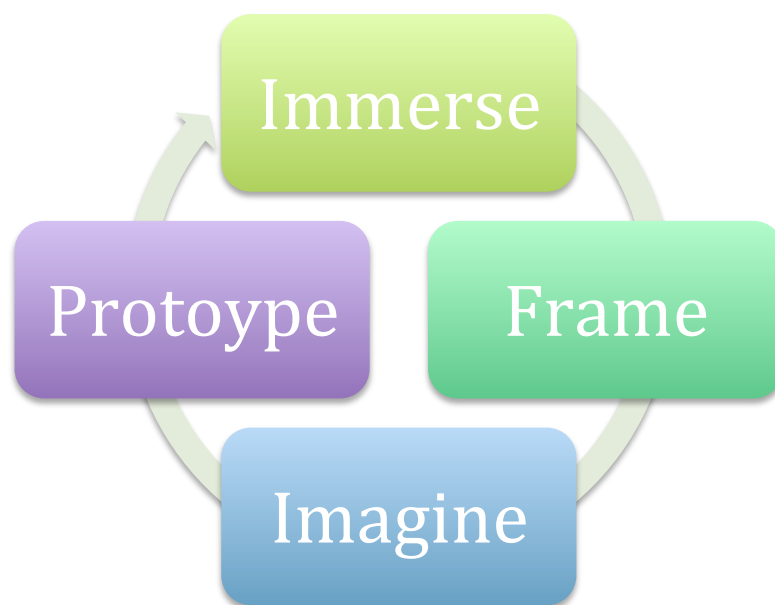
*Launch the new Rhode Island plan and create the conditions for its success*

Through the combined efforts of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, the Ambassador Design Team, and the thousands of participating Rhode Islanders, we will launch a plan for our educational future.

The strategic planning process was based upon a design-thinking model that encouraged the values of optimism, curiosity, and empathy. The strategic planning team and I began the process by developing a statewide educational survey to collect both quantitative and qualitative data across the state on the major challenges and opportunities for public education in Rhode Island. From these data, the members of the strategic planning writing team, called the Ambassador Design Team, engaged in a design thinking cycle. In step 1, they immersed in the data. These data included the findings from the surveys, individual interviews across the data, national and international readings, and even interviews with content experts. In step 2, they then took this data and framed their efforts. This framing typically included identifying common themes, key takeaways, and priority areas. In step 3, they imagined solutions from these frames. This ideation took

place through rapid brainstorming and collaborative consultancies among team members. In step 4, these solutions were then turned into drafts that went out for broader public feedback as prototypes (draft parts of the actual strategic plan). The Ambassador Design Team then took this feedback to start a new cycle of plan development.

**Figure 6: ADT Design Thinking Process**



For additional detail on the Strategic planning process, see Appendix B.

### *Forming the Ambassador Design Team*

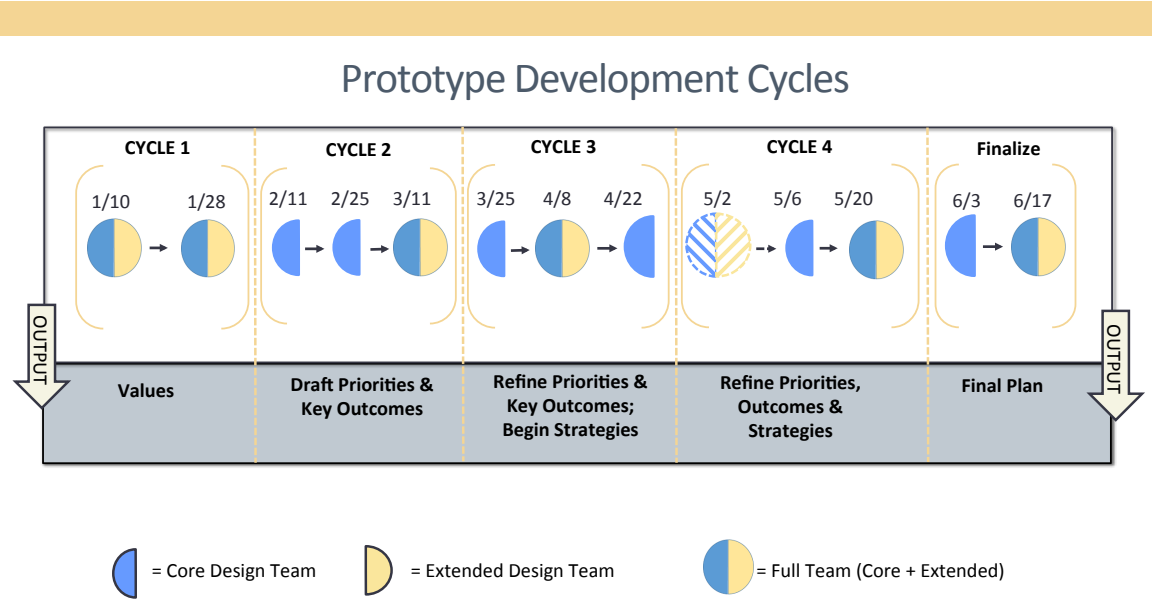
The Ambassador Design Team was the critical innovation to this strategic planning process. This group of diverse community members served as the writers of the strategic plan itself. Why have external writers? Because for this plan to be one that truly challenges RIDE's role, reframes its priorities, and is owned by the entire state, it needed to be written by those who were outside of RIDE. It needed to be a community plan, written by the Rhode Island community.

**ADT Selection:** The Council selected ADT members through a competitive process. The RIDE Strategic Planning team, of which I was a member, developed an application that was posted and distributed across the state in November 2014 for what was anticipated to be approximately 10 spots for a “core” writing team who contributed 60 hours of time to the writing of the plan and an extended team of 10-15 members who contributed 30 hours to writing the plan. While the core team had primary responsibility for writing the plan, the extended team served as critical thought partners and dreamers throughout the design process. By the end of November, over 200 people had applied for the ADT. To further vet members of the ADT, we developed and invited applicants to a “design party”, an evening meeting where applicants were oriented to the process and expectations of the ADT and given an experience in the design thinking approaches that undergird the strategic planning process (For more information on the design party, see Appendix D). Over 120 applicants attended the design party events and, according to

exit surveys, all but three potential members left the event with even greater excitement about the proposed process. Following the design parties, applicants were reviewed using a weighting that referenced numerous identifiers to develop the most balanced and wide reaching team possible. We then recommended a slate of 12 core team members and 14 extended team members to the Council for final approval. See Appendix C for a summary of the composition of the ADT.

**ADT Process:** The development of the strategic plan by the ADT followed a logical sequence that moved the development of the plan from the establishment of overarching values for the system, then key educational priorities for the system, and finally, RIDE specific strategies to enact these priorities. Figure 7 summarizes this sequence.

**Figure 7: ADT Strategic Plan Development Process**

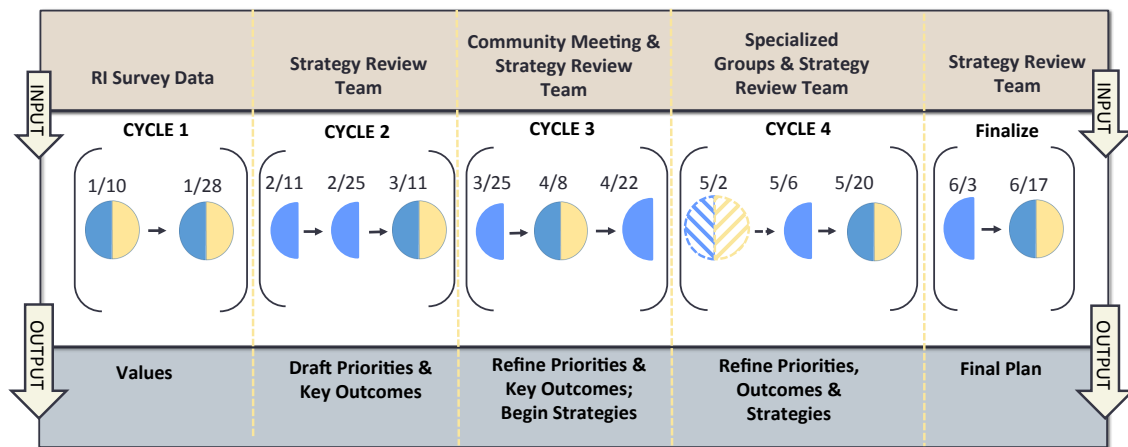


Key stakeholder input informed the development of each section of the plan. These inputs included data from a statewide community survey of more than 10,000 participants, results from statewide community convenings with hundreds of participants focused on the future of education (hosted by community partners), and information from educator focus groups hosted to identify the successes and limits of current educational efforts and the identification of future priorities. Figure 8 summarizes the inputs that were used to form the basis of the ADT’s design thinking processes.

**Figure 8: Community Inputs**



## Community Input to the Development Cycle



### *Phase 3: Facilitating the Ambassador Design Team*

My most critical leadership role in the Strategic Planning process was as co-facilitator of the ADT. In this role, I worked closely with David Moscarelli, the 2015 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year as my co-facilitator, to design each of the ADT's bi-weekly two-hour meetings. Facilitator activities included developing a breadth of activities to help these ADT community volunteers learn from one another, make rapid decisions, and share their best thinking publically. Doing so successfully was a real challenge, as it forced a difficult confluence of high-paced, high stakes, highly public learning experiences with people of extremely diverse backgrounds from across the state. This challenge was augmented by the reality that this group had a wide range of prior education experience and exposure to systems-level thinking. This diversity of

foundational knowledge created a significant test to enabling collective learning and shared consensus within the room. Much of our work as facilitators was ensuring each member could fully participate in the work each week and that all voices and opinions were heard and honored in the room.

To that end, my core role as facilitator was striking a balance between achieving the meeting's task, developing transparent and inclusive processes for accomplishing that task, and creating the conditions for relationship-building within the team to enable trust and collaboration in the room. Balancing task, process, and relationships was particularly challenging since this strategic planning process was based upon design thinking rapid prototyping. ADT members felt a constant urgency to produce drafts and make sense of public feedback. This pressure often made focusing on relationships challenging.

To address these unique tests, David and I spent some 16 hours of planning on every two-hour meeting agenda. We also developed offline experiences such as guided readings, open response questions, and surveys as weekly homework to continue the ADT's learning outside of meetings and to provide us the necessary formative information to plan the next series of meetings.

As co-facilitators, we also acted in a marketing and public relations capacity, often communicating the work of the ADT out at Council meetings, RIDE agency wide meetings, and community forums. We even developed short public videos that were released with each prototype to communicate the current status of strategic planning

efforts and how the public could give the most helpful feedback to the ADT. In many ways, I found myself going from a designer of the strategic planning process in theory to being thrust to the center of the process in a very public way. David and I also fully internalized the reality that this strategic planning approach would either succeed or fail based upon our facilitation of the ADT and our ability to help them manage the stress of rapid prototyping, the challenge of weighing controversial and polarizing educational reform topics, and overcoming the complexities of state-level strategic planning.


### **Timeline of Key ADT Actions through March 2015**



<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Result</b>
1/10	ADT Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26 ADT members engaged in a daylong retreat that asked them to connect with one another and reflect on the survey responses of 10,000 Rhode Islanders.</li> </ul>
1/28	ADT Values Draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26 ADT members took the clustered topics from survey analysis and identified draft value statements. They then sent these drafts out as a first “prototype” for broad-based feedback.</li> </ul>
2/11	Making sense of public feedback on values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26 ADT members reviewed feedback and revised values. (See Appendix E for first prototype)</li> </ul>

2/25	Drafting priorities/key outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The ADT core team developed a first draft version of priorities for review by broader ADT</li> </ul>
3/11	Refining priorities and key outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ADT refined priority statements and released 2<sup>nd</sup> prototype comprised of revised value statements and draft priority statements.</li> </ul>

## Results

My RKA laid out a theory of action that began with the development of a facilitated process that encouraged RIDE to engage in double-loop learning in the short term and enabled a strategic plan that sustained learning and education transformation over the long term. While the duration of this project exceeded the deadline for the capstone, the following results section identifies the degree to which the elements of the theory of action were achieved.

Theory of action “if” statements...	Success to date	Major results
Engage RIDE leadership and staff in reflecting upon “why” the agency exists as well as the successes and lessons of the current strategic plan		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted ALT/Director survey to identify priorities, non-negotiable, and key roles of Agency</li> <li>Engaged the agency in Simon Sinek’s “Golden Circle” process to identify the “Why” of the agency in addition to the “What” and “How”</li> <li>Conducted a half day retreat of agency leadership ALT/Directors and staff</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hosted on-going RIDE internal engagement</li> </ul>
Design and implement a strategic planning process that includes the broader Rhode Island public in setting educational priorities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed the Ambassador Design Team model</li> <li>Designed the iterative cycle of prototypes and feedback</li> <li>Co-facilitated the Ambassador Design Team</li> <li>RIDE leadership and the Council approved and supported this inclusive planning model</li> </ul>
<b>Theory of action “then” statement...</b>	<b>Success to date</b>	<b>Major results</b>
RIDE will develop a strategic plan that is based upon the best thinking of the state, promotes RIDE’s continuous learning, and commands broad-based public support.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10,000 Rhode Islanders participated in survey that served as basis for plan development</li> <li>200 Rhode Islanders gave direct feedback on the first Prototype.</li> <li>300 Rhode Islanders gave direct feedback on the second Prototype.</li> <li>90 percent of agency engaged in strategic planning process on an ongoing basis by providing content expertise and data support to ADT writers and feedback on prototypes</li> <li>Ambassador Design Team playing go to role for selecting the new educational priorities of the state</li> </ul>

### **Action #1: Reflecting on the why and lessons from past five years-**

The focus of the first phase of the strategic project was creating the conditions for learning and reflection in the organization. The team and I achieved this goal by

conducting an agency survey that asked ALT and Directors to identify the key priorities of the future strategic plan, the non-negotiable areas, and the role of the agency overall. Appendix F summarizes the major findings of this survey. An analysis of these data revealed that staff believed RIDE had played the role of visionary, resource provider, and minimum-standard setter over the last five years. There was also a general commitment that RIDE should continue to promote their work in educator quality, setting high academic standards, holding schools accountable, and promoting graduation standards. These surveys were then followed up by interviews conducted by the Northeastern Comprehensive Center.

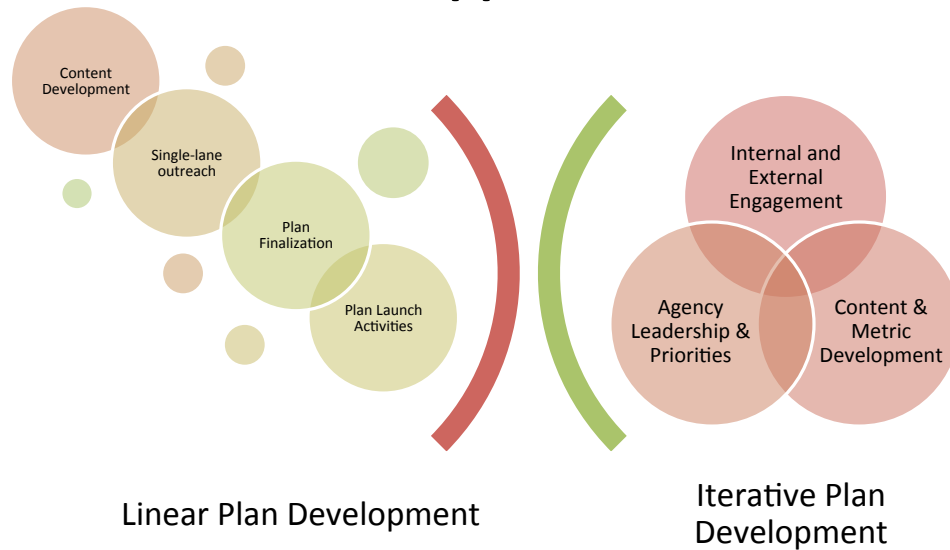
We also engaged the agency in a much deeper question of “why” it even exists. Using Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle concept, we hosted agency small group meetings to develop their individual answers to “why”. We then collected these data and analyzed their results. As a result of over 50 individual responses from across the agency and a half-day retreat to solidify these ideas into single statements, RIDE leadership settled on two draft statements that best reflected their thinking on the role and purpose of the agency. Overall, the results from these efforts included both reflections on the content and the process of the strategic efforts over the last few years.

**Action #2: Designing a public facing strategic planning process- Moving from RIDE controlled to Community Lead**

At the outset of the strategic planning process, RIDE leadership had to face one guiding decision- How would RIDE engage the public? As noted before, the previous strategic plan was developed by RIDE staff solely and then shared with constituencies across the state for support and buy-in. The result was tepid buy-in on the part of districts and communities that eroded over time. This new strategic planning process sought to take a different approach – but what, exactly? Figure 9 describes the initial design of the strategic planning process. The initial thinking for the strategic planning process included a fairly innovative approach to planning. It included the concept of iteration based upon the tenants of design thinking. The basic idea was that there would be a process of stakeholder feedback on multiple drafts of the strategic plan written by RIDE.

***Figure 9: Initial Strategic Planning Process as of June 26, 2014***

## Proposed Strategic Plan Planning Approach

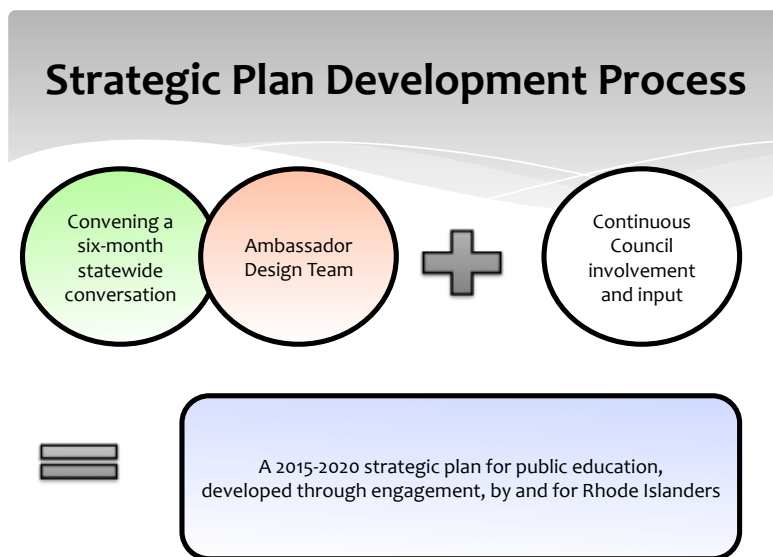


RIDE leadership identified five driving rationales for designing a plan using the iterative vs. linear approach. (1) External conditions require inclusive engagement. (2) Internal conditions require inclusive engagement. (3) Our relationships with LEA's have fundamentally changed. (4) We need to define our role with our stakeholders. (5) We know our partners and believe there might be more. While these five beliefs acknowledged the need for inclusivity, this iterative design still placed the responsibility for writing the plan squarely in the hands of RIDE staff.



By September 2014, the concept of what it meant to engage the public had shifted both within the leadership of RIDE and from the perspective of the Council. To be truly inclusive and develop a plan that was not RIDE's plan alone, RIDE redesigned the strategic planning process and placed the writing of the plan exclusively in the hands of a 26-member team Ambassador Design Team comprised of educators and community members from across the state. Figure 10 describes the change in the design of the strategic plan as a result this shift.

***Figure 10: Strategic Planning Process Design as of October 27, 2014***



The comparison between the initial vision and the final Council approved design underscores the shift in perspective. RIDE leadership from the Council down, flipped its model for writing the plan. RIDE moved from a model of ongoing engagement with its

staff writing the plan, to empowering the community to write the plan on behalf of the Council itself.

**Action #3: Enacting a strategic plan that is based upon best thinking of state, facilitates continuous learning within RIDE, and that commands broad based public support –**

While the strategic plan will not be completed until July 2015, several results suggest these intended results are happening:

- **Best Thinking of State** - To launch the strategic plan writing process, the strategic planning team developed a survey that asked Rhode islanders to identify the key education priorities, improvements, and future skills of students across the state. Nearly 11,000 Rhode Islanders participated in this survey. The results of this survey formed the basis of the ADT's writing efforts. Subsequently, hundreds of Rhode Islanders have been interviewed by the ADT to identify their biggest education priorities. During March, over 600 community members were engaged in Education 2020 Learning Exchanges to collect their best thinking on education priorities and strategies for action.
- **RIDE's continuous learning-** Concurrent to the massive public engagement efforts, RIDE developed an internal process for engagement in the strategic plan. Our strategic planning team hosted full agency meetings called "AllRIDE's" monthly to update the entire staff on the progress of the plan. We also held

strategic planning drop-in sessions bi-monthly where RIDE employees could give specific feedback to current prototype ideas or offer priorities for consideration during their writing. Internal champions from every office organized learning sessions for their colleagues that focus on each level of the plan –values, priorities, key outcomes, and strategies. ALLRIDE surveys were conducted to collect data and feedback. Across all these forms of engagement and learning, RIDE participation soared to over 90 percent of the agency.

- **Broad-Based Public Support** – While the strategic plan itself is in the early formation, several results suggest there is broad-based support developing for the plan. Over 4,000 citizens asked to stay informed and engaged in the process. Furthermore, nearly 200 citizens gave specific feedback on the first strategic plan prototype, and 300 gave feedback on the second prototype. While the state is in a moment of transition and is actively looking for a new state Commissioner for Education, the Governor and her staff continues to be supportive of the strategic process by attending ADT meetings and even engaging the ADT in discussions about the qualities of the new Commissioner.

## **Analysis**

While these results are promising, the initial assumption of this entire project is that in this post-Race to the Top Era, SEA's must make a pivot and face these uncertain times by becoming learning organizations. The fundamental question, then, is-has RIDE

become a learning organization? Elmore (2009) argued that creating the conditions for a learning organization requires that “people have to learn to think and act in different ways around their work, and the old ways of thinking and doing are easier and safer than the new ways” (p. 4). These changes in thinking and mindset certainly do not happen overnight. In fact, it requires an intentional strategy and safe space for this challenging of perspective. In my initial RKA, I posited that creating a high functioning, learning-focused team could create the context for learning within an organization and that this learning would enable the role of the SEA to shift (see Figure 1 reproduced below).

**Figure 1: From Teaming to Shifting the Role of the SEA**



Furthermore, I contended that it was not enough to create a learning organization, but that success required a learning organization that engaged in what Argyis and Schon (1979) called double-loop learning. By double-loop learning, they meant a challenging of fundamental beliefs and values, instead of just adopting a new strategy or tactic in the face of problems. So, is there any reason to believe that double-loop learning might be happening at RIDE?

Yes, there is. Initially, RIDE imagined a strategic planning process that “engaged” the public by soliciting their feedback through an iterative process. However, after some 60 days of attempting to formalize this strategic planning design, first the planning team, and then the broader staff, engaged in a process of identifying “why” the agency existed and what roles it should be fulfilling. This powerful learning moment caused the agency to challenge an invisible value of control within the agency and an assumption that it should be in control of the strategic planning process. Instead, RIDE staff and leadership realized that they should change their mindset from one of leading the writing to handing over the power of the pen to the community itself. RIDE then put itself in the role of iterative feedback giver. This represented a 180-degree change in perspective and mindset for RIDE leadership, and a strong indication of double loop learning.

What drove this double-loop learning and paradigm shift within the agency? After nearly 10 months of effort, I take away the following key lessons that I believe had the most impact on the project and its results.

***Lesson#1- Form a small, influential, learning-focused team within RIDE***

*Team Selection:* At the outset of this strategic project, the Commissioner formed a small team within the agency. It was comprised of a Chief within the organization, a Broad Fellow who had been in the agency for just a year, me, as an EdLD fellow, and few months later, a RIDE staffer with some five years in the agency, and finally, the state

teacher of the year. This team may seem unconventional. It was no coincidence that none of these staff had been involved in the development of the former strategic plan and most had only a few years, at most, experience with the agency. What was the result? The team had a uniquely fresh perspective on the efforts of the five years and an openness to the lessons learned from these efforts. This newness helped make it easier to challenge the assumptions that had been made about how a strategic planning process could be run. It might have seemed unwise to charge this relatively new team with effectively leading the strategic planning efforts. One might have expected the lack of veteran leaders might have resulted in marginalization by the rest of the department. However, this team also had the benefit of a Division Chief as its team leader. This individual had significant influence with the Commissioner. As a result, this team as a whole had the ear of the Commissioner, and thus, the cover and support to act. The importance of this direct link to the Commissioner cannot be understated. It was a critical factor influencing the success of this team. Without it, the bold, risky actions of turning over writing authority to the public would never have been considered by key decision makers within the agency.

*Teaming Routines:* In addition to selecting the right members, I was tasked with facilitating the internal team, and I intentionally employed best practices in teaming to create the structures and routines that enabled learning. Each meeting included a

purposeful agenda and rotating roles of facilitator, note taker, and process checker. The agenda intentionally allocated time for interpersonal connections that served to build trust and synergy around members. The agenda also allotted time at the end of each meeting to give feedback and share reflections on both the meeting and the team itself. These structures and routines built trust and enabled the practice of inquiry and shared decision-making among members. As a result of these efforts, the team challenged each other's thinking, assumptions, and beliefs, creating the conditions for learning within the team itself.

*Communicating Up and Out:* While these rich and purposeful teaming routines built a learning focused culture within this small team, the ultimate decision makers were not directly a part of the team and included the Commissioner and the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education. Effectively communicating not just the suggested design of the strategic planning process, but also the reason why this design was the best possible choice now became the single most important factor to getting approval to engage in a novel approach to statewide education strategic planning. Andrea Castaneda, the Chief of Fiscal Integrity and most senior agency member on the strategic planning team played a critical role within the agency leadership structure of communicating the thinking and rationale of the strategic planning team. She managed up to both the Commissioner and her senior cabinet peers to get internal political cover and support for the team's efforts.

Andrea had weekly check-ins with the Commissioner, managed the planning budget and provided process updates for the Council. The Commissioner then communicated directly with the Board and Council chairs to elaborate on strategic planning proposals and garner support for their approval at Council meetings. These calls were followed by well-rehearsed, carefully orchestrated presentations to the entire Council. These strategic efforts to communicate to decision-makers within the agency ensured the learning being done by the team could then translate into action that was agreeable with the Council.

While simultaneously communicating up, the team also focused on communicating outwards to the rest of the staff through targeted engagement strategies that asked RIDE employees to give input into strategic planning designs, reflect on the lessons over the last five years, and identify future agency roles and priorities. These methods served to keep RIDE engaged and informed about the process. It also served to help RIDE staff engage in learning themselves. Through facilitated meetings, the strategic planning staff gave space for the entire RIDE staff to reflect on lessons learned, challenge their own assumptions, and engage in dialogue with one another. In so doing, the RIDE strategic planning team helped grow the sphere of learning from this small core team to a large part of the agency.

***Lesson# 2- Give the learning a push by taking advantage of a moment of change***

While it is true that creating effective teams enabled learning to happen within the



agency, it is not accurate to say that teaming *alone* was responsible for the 180-degree shift in RIDE's approach to strategic planning. On the contrary, two precipitating factors impelled RIDE leadership to recognize an urgent and important need for this shift.

*Factor #1: Political Undermining of Previous Strategic Plan Initiatives*

During the 2014 Spring/Summer legislative session of the Rhode Island General Assembly, lawmakers passed a series of measures that effectively halted many of the major strategic initiatives of RIDE. Following some public outcry on the use of graduation exams as a requirement for graduation, legislators placed a moratorium on the use of testing as a consideration for graduation until 2017. This effectively halted a key component of what RIDE called the Diploma System (see Appendix G). Secondly, the General Assembly passed a bill that only required highly effective teachers to be evaluated on two or three year cycles, instead of annually. Since the vast majority of teachers in Rhode Island were rated as highly effective, this arrested many of RIDE's efforts to ensure teacher evaluation was linked to student performance annually. Lastly, the General Assembly passed a bill that created a separate oversight board for career and technical education. Taken together, these actions communicated a significant challenge to the efforts that many in the agency had been leading for years, and created an internal sense of urgency that their approach was not supported and that something needed to change.

This pressure from the outside meant that RIDE needed to consider a different approach to working with public constituencies. They needed to approach their work through a clear signal of partnership and engagement if they hoped to regain the political legitimacy that was so crucial to making transformational reforms last. In this case, it was a true axiom that people support the ideas they create. To gain support from the public, the public would need to take some leadership in creating the direction of the state.

### *Factor #2: Impending Gubernatorial Change*

In addition to the sweeping reaction against some of RIDE's most important strategic initiatives, the entire state braced for the realities of a change in Governor in November of 2014. The significance of a change in Governor cannot be understated. In Rhode Island, the governor appoints the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education. He/she has tremendous influence on the selection of the Commissioner of Education and decides RIDE's budget. For internal staff at RIDE, this impending change could be characterized as an abyss of uncertainty. RIDE leaders wondered – Would the efforts of the last five years continue? Would the Commissioner remain through the Gubernatorial transition? What could be done to encourage sustainability of current efforts and a continuity of leadership?

In many ways, this work was about organizational change. In John Kotter's

(1995) 8 steps to transformational change, the first step is to create a sense of urgency.

The confluence of actions by the general assembly and the rapidly approaching gubernatorial election created just that sense of urgency. In the backdrop of this moment of change, RIDE leadership saw something dramatic had to happen. To see the state through this transition, strategic planning efforts could not rely on the influence and thinking of just a few informed leaders. It could not be a plan led solely by the Commissioner. This new strategy could not just be the agency's strategy. It needed to be the people of Rhode Island's strategy. Tacit, lukewarm community support would not be enough to see the state through this change and ensure the efforts of the past five years were built upon. Rather, the community needed to be in the driver's seat. Only then could the community learning and support truly emerge to take the state to the next level. While it might be accurate to say that most of RIDE's leadership was aware of this impending uncertainty, many did not see the strategic plan as a cornerstone to aid this transition. In many ways, the strategic planning team served as the linchpin for this agency realization. The team enabled this dramatic shift by devoting the time and talent to acting with this urgency in mind, and then creating the conditions for learning within the agency itself.

### ***Lesson #3:Clarifying the Boundaries of Engagement***

The act of shifting from a relatively RIDE directed strategic planning process to a process that was one of shared responsibility between the Council, RIDE, and the broader

community, represented by the Ambassador Design Team, called for a constant focus on ensuring each party understood their role, authority, and responsibility in the collaborative partnership. For the Council, this meant being briefed with regular updates on the activities of the ADT and them giving feedback and direction to the ADT's products. For RIDE, it meant providing content expertise to the ADT on major education priorities in the state and reacting to prototypes produced by the ADT. For the ADT, this meant taking seriously the task of producing the highest quality first drafts of strategic thinking and being responsive and open to the feedback of the community, RIDE, and the Council.

Sitting at the center of this clarification of role was the matter of who had power. All three parties heard the same message- namely that, ultimately, power to decide upon the education priorities of the state sat with the Council. The Council appointed the ADT to produce the best possible draft of this strategic plan to be approved by them. RIDE's power rested in its deep content expertise and professional responsibility to enact these strategic priorities and turn them into an operational plan that could be resourced and executed. Speaking openly about this flow of power and the corresponding roles fostered greater transparency in the process. This focus on transparency, in turn, engendered trust, and trust enabled collaborative learning among all three groups.

### ***Implications for My Theory of Action***

At the outset of my project, I suggested the following theory of action:

*If I, as a member of the RIDE strategic planning team, engage RIDE leadership and staff in reflecting upon “why” the agency exists as well as the successes and lessons of the current strategic plan, and if we, as a strategic planning team, use these lessons to design a strategic planning process that includes the broader Rhode Island public in setting educational priorities, then RIDE will enact a strategic plan that is based upon the best thinking of the state, commands broad-based public support, and promotes RIDE’s continuous learning.*

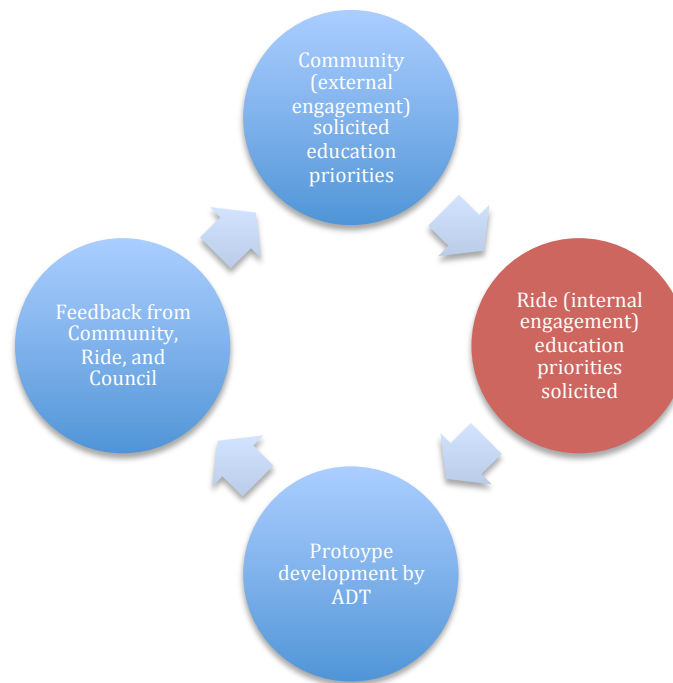
If only efforts in real life worked that cleanly. Instead, the reality is that many aspects of the theory did in fact hold up and other factors unaccounted for in the theory played a much more significant role than anticipated.

**Confirming parts of my theory:** The entry of teaming as a tool to foster learning within the SEA did in fact prove true. I further learned that the selection of members, the level of influence the team had on the leaders of the organization, and the implementation of best practices in teaming all played important roles in making the team truly successful. Additionally, the belief that including the Rhode Island public in setting educational priorities also proved to be an important decision point that provided critical sway on the thinking of agency leadership as well as fostered collaboration and trust between government and the public.

**Challenging parts of my theory:** On the other hand, I significantly underestimated the supreme effort it would take to ensure RIDE was engaged throughout the process, especially since they were not represented in the writing of the plan. This dilemma was compounded by the reality that they would be tasked with “enacting” the plan, though they did not write it. I was missing the critical concept of agency ownership. I believed that if RIDE reflected on the past and empowered the ADT, they would then learn and somehow take ownership for the results of this new plan. To the contrary, the challenge of not being primary writers of the plan meant that for many in the agency, this plan was a distant afterthought that would have a yet-to-be-determined impact on the day-to-day lives of the RIDE employees.

To ensure that RIDE staff were as engaged as possible and that their expertise and thoughts were honored by the work of the ADT, the strategic planning team had to develop a significant undertaking of ongoing internal engagement that was unaccounted for in my theory of action. In some ways, this theory of action overly privileged the work of the community in writing the plan and, at least initially, miscalculated the importance of developing intentional external **and** internal engagement. In the end, the success of these efforts required both a balance of internal and external engagement, working in concert with one another, and feeding each other’s learning. Figure 11 summarizes this observation.

***Figure 11: A revised balance between RIDE and community engagement***



### **Implications for self, site, and sector**

#### **Implications for Self**

As I reflect on these last ten months, several questions stand out for me. First, how did I get here? I entered this residency experience as a RIDE Fellow spending only about a quarter of my time working on strategic planning efforts. By the end of my residency, I was a co-facilitator of the ADT, charged with writing the plan, and spending the majority of my time on these efforts. How did this shift happen? To find this out, I debriefed with members of my strategic planning team. Several key observations emerged from those

conversations. First, employing the practices of facilitative leadership, and specifically Sam Kaner's work on participatory decision-making as a member of the team enabled the training and skills I had developed in facilitation over the years to stand out to RIDE leadership. By being a facilitative leader and team player, my ability to create participatory decision-making among the strategic planning group emerged, I found that helping my own strategic planning team and other teams in the agency build their capacity to participate in their own shared and sustainable decision-making by (1) encouraging full participation, (2) promoting mutual understanding, (3) foster inclusive solutions, and (4) cultivating shared responsibility had the unintended effect of allowing a core skill that I had been developing shine in ways that I didn't even imagine was possible. (Kaner et al., 2014).

As an implication, then, this lesson suggests that leading using a facilitative style that builds a team and includes that team in participatory decision-making might be a natural leadership style that I should build upon. However, this observation does not suggest, that as a senior leader, I would need to make all decisions in this facilitative style. There are times when this approach might be inefficient or ill advised. In fact, as co-facilitator of the ADT, there were times when decisions within my purview just needed to be made by me and my co-facilitator, rather than other members of the team. At those times, I know I sought more feedback and participation from other team members than either necessary or efficient. I leaned towards participatory decision-



making rather than individual decision-making. I must be mindful to balance decisiveness when leading in the facilitative style that comes most naturally to me.

This need becomes particularly important as my institutional authority increases. It is entirely possible for a decision that seems morally or strategically clear to me to not be one that is either popular or supported by others. This scenario would rightfully challenge my naturally facilitative style. Already, this tension has emerged in my residency. For example, ensuring the ADT's focus on equity in this plan is a prime example of a challenge to a simply facilitative approach to leadership. With 20,000 students in low-performing seats and a disproportionate number of African-American and Latino students in those seats, developing a plan that addresses this challenge should be paramount. Yet, the strategies have been slow to emerge. As the commissioner, it would be my role to decisively respond to that reality and to describe in no uncertain terms that I could not recommend a plan that does not address this issue as a major portion of the overall state strategy. While facilitative leadership is ideal for building group learning, placing a line in the sand as the senior leader also plays an important role in holding us all accountable to doing the most challenging work. Though I must be strategic about how and when I use my authority to set the boundaries, I, nevertheless, must be prepared to draw and hold that line if I am to be the leader that is both most effective at producing substantive change and the person of which I can be proud.

Secondly, receiving this role happened because in addition to strong facilitative skills, I also have relatively strong interpersonal skills. The first time I really heard this described was when Liz City, Director of the EdLD Program, shared with me her observation of my “strong interpersonal skills” in a one-on-one meeting. I had frankly never ever thought of myself in that way. To me, it felt more like I cared about people individually and believed that it was important to invest in them genuinely. I did not think of these as interpersonal skills. However, entering RIDE I received the same feedback, using the exact words of “strong interpersonal skills”. What that translated to me was an ability to work with all kinds of people and to build a collaborative and trusting environment among others. This natural approach has helped support my emerging skills in facilitation and enhanced the psychological safety of the experience for the members of the ADT.

Thirdly, I believe a strength that enabled me to grow to such a meaningful role and impact in the agency over such a short time is my genuine commitment to my own learning and growth. In many ways, EdLD and my personal mastery goals have helped me be more transparent and accepting of my learning stance. Before EdLD, I had a misconception about leadership, particularly as a very young leader among more seasoned leaders. I believed I had to demonstrate competence at all times to measure up. Entering this residency, I had a very different belief and, thus, a very different practice. I came to believe that leadership was about inquiry and understanding. It was as much

about honoring what others and I did not know as it was about bringing to bear the tools and skills we did know. This mindset shift has helped better prepare me for leadership generally, and the challenges of the unknown, specifically.

The second question that stands out to me is was it just a coincidence that RIDE embarked on a strategic planning process that gave the community a prominent role in writing the plan and that I had previous experience in developing a strategic planning processes that begin by engaging the broader public and then empowering government and the community to work collaborative to address those priorities? I believe not. During early strategic planning design meetings, I gladly shared my previous experience at turning strategic planning on its head by empowering the community to write and lead the planning process and highlighted the benefits such an inclusive process produced for long-term sustainability. I distinctly remember an August meeting in which the strategic planning team had a vigorous discussion about what developing a strategic plan based upon community feedback really meant. I pushed the Chief to see that if we truly want this strategic plan to be the state's plan, we have to engage the state in writing it. From that moment forward, the strategic planning efforts begin to shift to a more inclusive public engagement process.

From this experience, I highlight several lessons for my own leadership. First, that working within government as a tempered radical pushing for more inclusive and collaborative solutions between government and community can have a powerful impact.

In many ways, by being a Fellow at RIDE, I had more access and influence to shift the conversation and create the public value than I could have potentially had outside the agency. I learned that so much about how decisions get made and how unscheduled, sidebar conversations drove decision making within government.

It is also heartening to know that the lever I believe is most missing from our current national reform efforts, namely that of developing shared responsibility between governments and communities for educational reform could be a lever that translated to all levels of the system, from individual schools up to the state department. It suggests, then, that this work is truly a powerful influencer. It can be and should be employed to ensure our strategies are not developed in an echo-chamber of like thinking and to extend the length of the political change clock by engaging multiple stakeholders in giving political cover and buy-in for reform initiative's successes.

The privilege of leading in an entirely new state and at an entirely new level of the system has helped me reify who I am at my core. I am a tempered radical who believes in the power of developing a committed and interrelated citizenry of educational practitioners and community partners who are devoted to transforming educational outcomes for all young people.

### **Implications for Site**

RIDE is in a significant moment of transition. The next commissioner, the new chair of the board, and the chair of the council will be named this spring. It is unclear

how these changes in leadership will affect other levels of the agency. Yet, despite this great uncertainty, thousands of Rhode Islanders are engaged in a process of defining the key priorities and strategies for state education over the next five years. It is a process that is supported by the Governor and has grassroots support across the state. The question for RIDE is how will it use the lessons of this strategic planning process to build upon a new spirit of goodwill and collaboration across the state. The following recommendations are key to ensuring the momentum continues to build within RIDE to make the pivot as an SEA.

**Recommendation #1: Stay the course on developing high functioning teams.**

The major lesson of this strategic project is that RIDE did not engage in double loop learning because the organization suddenly became a “learning organization”. On the contrary, the act of learning began with a small team focused on not just problem solving, but on questioning the fundamental frame or how and why RIDE did what it did. This team then developed the environment for more staff to engage in that questioning and provided a way forward to act upon that learning. RIDE must continue to develop these teams around their major initiatives to serve as an engine that enables learning to continue within the agency. True to form, these teams should be comprised of a cross representation of staff and chaired by a Division chief. They should be intentionally focused on strategic initiatives and not just typical RIDE related efforts to execute. RIDE

is already organized to execute around its core functions. Investing in high function teams builds its capacity to organize to learn (Edmondson, 2012).

There is evidence to suggest these teams can be built. Through the course of the year, five leaders in the division have already begun to mirror and adopt best practices in teaming. These individuals have been trained in the building of agendas that attend to task, process, and relationships at the same time. Furthermore, rather than focus on simply giving leaders with institutional authority leadership of teams, the agency can accelerate the adoption of teaming by developing teams based upon priority work streams with a facilitator of the team selected for their expertise and ability to lead a productive team. This person does not have to be the hierarchical leader of the office. Instead, the hierarchical leader's role would be to support and manage the team facilitator as he or she leads the project team. This concept has already been applied to one key division project, and the results are already promising. RIDE should continue to expand these efforts. Building upon the capacity built in people and process will yield greater impact to the agency's efforts to become more learning centered.

**Recommendation #2: Align the agency's efforts to fully enact the next strategic plan**

The final strategic plan will represent the voices of many. Failure to ensure capacity of the organization to focus on implementing these co-owned priorities has the potential to do irreparable damage to the trust between stakeholders and RIDE. To prevent this, RIDE

must develop an operational plan that clearly and reasonably responds to the direction of the strategic plan. It must spend time in communicating that response to the public and distribute responsibility for meeting these goals across the agency and at all levels of the agency. Lastly, RIDE must share progress on how it's doing in meeting these goals. A key barrier to achieving this alignment is fostering RIDE's staff ownership for the plan. Since the writing of the plan does not rest with these professionals, the ownership for the plan itself could be challenging to develop. To ensure the plan is reflective of the best thinking of RIDE, as well as the state, RIDE must continue to provide input to the content of the plan, provide advisory support to the community writers, and give critical feedback to the ADT's prototype drafts. In the end, the final strategic plan should represent the words and thinking of the agency as well as the broader community. Feedback from the first two prototypes indicate that both groups are in relative agreement about the future of education, so alignment is absolutely possible, and necessary.

### **Recommendation #3: Continue to engage the public in reform efforts**

RIDE's efforts to engage the state should not be an "event" that happens once every five years. To truly build community support and ownership for transforming education, RIDE must engage and develop two-way communication channels with all of its stakeholders (community, students, educators, elected officials, etc.). RIDE should think of public engagement not as a noun (an event or activity), but as a verb (an ongoing action). To do so, RIDE should consider developing an office of engagement and

communications that ensures there is a systemic and systematic approach to engagement and communications across the agency and with all stakeholders. This office could support all other efforts in the agency and even embed team members into key work streams across the agency. It should be charged with an engagement process that happens consistently. It could also be the office responsible for communicating the ongoing progress of the strategic plan over the next five years. The important takeaway is that one cannot expect these efforts to continue unless staff time and expertise are allocated to ensuring they happen.

### **Implications for Sector**

The lessons of RIDE over the last five years and its subsequent commitment to double-loop learning and change are informative for the entire sector. SEA's across the country invested tremendous financial and political capital on Race to the Top initiatives. These efforts focused on the right work- standards, data, school accountability systems, and educator practice. The carrot of federal dollars in a financial recession brought the needed partners to the table to sign on with lukewarm support. The results, at least in Rhode Island, but in many other states as well, suggest that this support eroded once the dollars dried up and the economy turned around. RIDE's response, however, represents a unique lesson for other SEA's.

**Lesson #1: Taking the time to build broad-based ownership and support matters to long-term success**



In many states, highly politicized reform efforts led by a few key power brokers resulted in the reforms of the last five years. The reality about this approach, however, is that the power of a few, absent broader ownership and public engagement in reform efforts, will predictably wane over time. After political upheaval, the reforms themselves are targeted, along with the leaders, for removal.

RIDE intentionally sought to address this challenge in this round of strategic planning. It focused on building broad-based, shared ownership among many different constituencies to sustain the efforts. Shared ownership means that the efforts have more likelihood to last and improve over time. This is true regardless of who is in official leadership positions. RIDE has shown that this building of broad-based ownership does not stop with engaging elected officials. Instead, these efforts have shown it is possible to engage in a statewide education conversation. There is appetite for it, and the results are both a better and more widely owned plan.

As a result, this work continues to build momentum and support in Rhode Island despite RIDE being in leadership transition with no new commissioner selected. In this leadership void, newly elected Governor Gina Raimondo has been supportive of the work of the Ambassador Design Team and signaled that these efforts will be both fruitful and transformational. In a context of leadership transition, no strategic planning would typically either be advised or supported. Yet, these efforts to build broad-based support

have created the conditions for efforts that are sustained through moments of change and transition.

Sustainability overtime and through change is a challenge of immense proportions throughout the education sector. The tenants of this strategic planning design can be transferred and applied beyond statewide planning.to many different situations. Communities can engage in this kind of strategic planning at a local level in partnership with school districts and city municipalities. Charter management organizations can engage in this kind of strategic planning in their community catchment areas and with their students' families. Higher education institutions for teacher and school leader training can modify this approach to focus on its continuous improvement and redesign in partnership with its current students as well as teachers and principals. In the end, this strategic planning design, which blends strategic planning, design thinking, and community organizing together, strengthens the shared ownership for sustained, purposeful action among a diverse group of educational actors in a given space and is a lesson that can and should be replicated.

**Lesson #2: SEA's can become more nimble, learning organizations.**

The development of teaming at RIDE suggests that it is possible to develop and resource a more agile and responsive learning-centered organization. However, this team must value challenging the status quo within the agency and be insulated from the expected discontent that such challenging could create. This team must also see its chief role as

creating the conditions for others in the agency to learn and contribute to these strategic efforts as well. RIDE's example suggests that if this team is thought of more as a conduit for agency learning, instead of an insulated and clandestine team, then the learning of the group can have a multiplier effect within the organization.

**Lesson #3: Engaging in an agency-level and statewide discovery of what the role and priorities of the SEA should be critical in this moment.**

Times are changing in education. In the United States of America, public education is a state's right, and the SEA will need to evolve with these changes. However, that evolution cannot happen in a vacuum. It requires an open and honest acknowledgement of what must be improved in the approaches and tactics of SEA's. The lessons from RIDE's efforts over the last 10 months suggest that these conversations must happen both inside the SEA and in the broader public. This may seem like a very daunting task for many SEA staff. It could mean a loss of some control and significant change in the way an SEA is structured and led. Yet, the alternative is to pretend that things are working, and waiting until significant backlash against initiatives and policy gut the SEA's ability act. History suggests that the SEA has always evolved, either forcibly or naturally. RIDE provides a positive example of how to do so productively and relatively proactively.

**Conclusion**

At the outset of this paper, I described the fundamental question for state education agencies across the country as how can SEAs lead their states to a truly transformative

vision for public education and then develop a strategy to achieve that vision which has the legitimacy and support of statewide constituents? I further called this a challenge of both technical knowhow and political will.

RIDE stands out as a unique example of what efforts to address this question might look like. The evidence and analysis of this project confirm that for SEA's to become catalysts for transforming public education in their states, they must first organize themselves to be learning organizations. By learning organizations, I mean an agency that is focused on exploring solutions, enabling best practices among schools, and scaling testable solutions. To be a learning organization, the staff must embody a spirit of collaboration, inquiry, and imagination. Furthermore, it is not enough to say that the staff learns from itself internally. The SEA as a learning organization must privilege learning from its constituencies across the state, as well as nationally and internationally. Only then can solutions to the complex education challenges facing states be identified and the public will to enact them be garnered.

The lessons for RIDE suggest this is certainly no small task. It is also crucial to acknowledge that this learning does not suggest that somehow the SEA must abandon its current statutory responsibilities. It is still required to ensure federal and state compliance. It is still asked to provide accountability oversight of schools. These actions don't need to change to enable learning. To the contrary, SEAs can do the work of compliance and accountability as well as provide effective supports to districts along

these currently intractable public education challenges by focusing on learning across the organization.

SEAs can take the first step to this learning organization by forming a small team charged with questioning and exploring the lessons of the recent efforts of the organization, creating conditions for the SEA staff to reflect and learn as a whole internally and then engaging the broader public across that state. RIDE has set a precedent for what's possible. It required creativity, ingenuity, political cover, leadership support, and an abiding commitment to inclusivity and transparency. But the results can be transformative. To that end, I am reminded of a famous quote by Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." SEAs can learn. In fact, it must be the core business of the organization. It can be done. Start small, act collaboratively, and dream with audacity, for the children of our nation.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A: Associated Press Articles

**EDUCATION WEEK**

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Published Online: December 12, 2014

**Team chosen to develop Rhode Island education plan**

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Twenty-six Rhode Islanders have been chosen to develop and write the state's next strategic plan for elementary and secondary education.

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education picked the team Thursday night and praised it for being diverse and talented. The team's goal is to draft a statewide vision for public education in Rhode Island through 2020.

Rhode Islanders were invited to apply to help develop the plan. More than 150 people completed applications.

State Board of Education Chairwoman Eva-Marie Mancuso says the team has the balance and expertise needed to develop a great strategic plan. It begins meeting this month and expects to complete the plan by June.

The group includes educators, nonprofit workers and students, among others.

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### Rhode Islanders asked to help with education plan

November 3, 2014

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Education officials are asking Rhode Islanders to help develop a strategic plan for elementary and secondary education.

The Board of Education, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and the Rhode Island Department of Education say the goal is to have a statewide vision for public education in Rhode Island through 2020.

Board of Education Chairwoman Eva-Marie Mancuso says they want the planning process to include those whom education policy affects most directly.

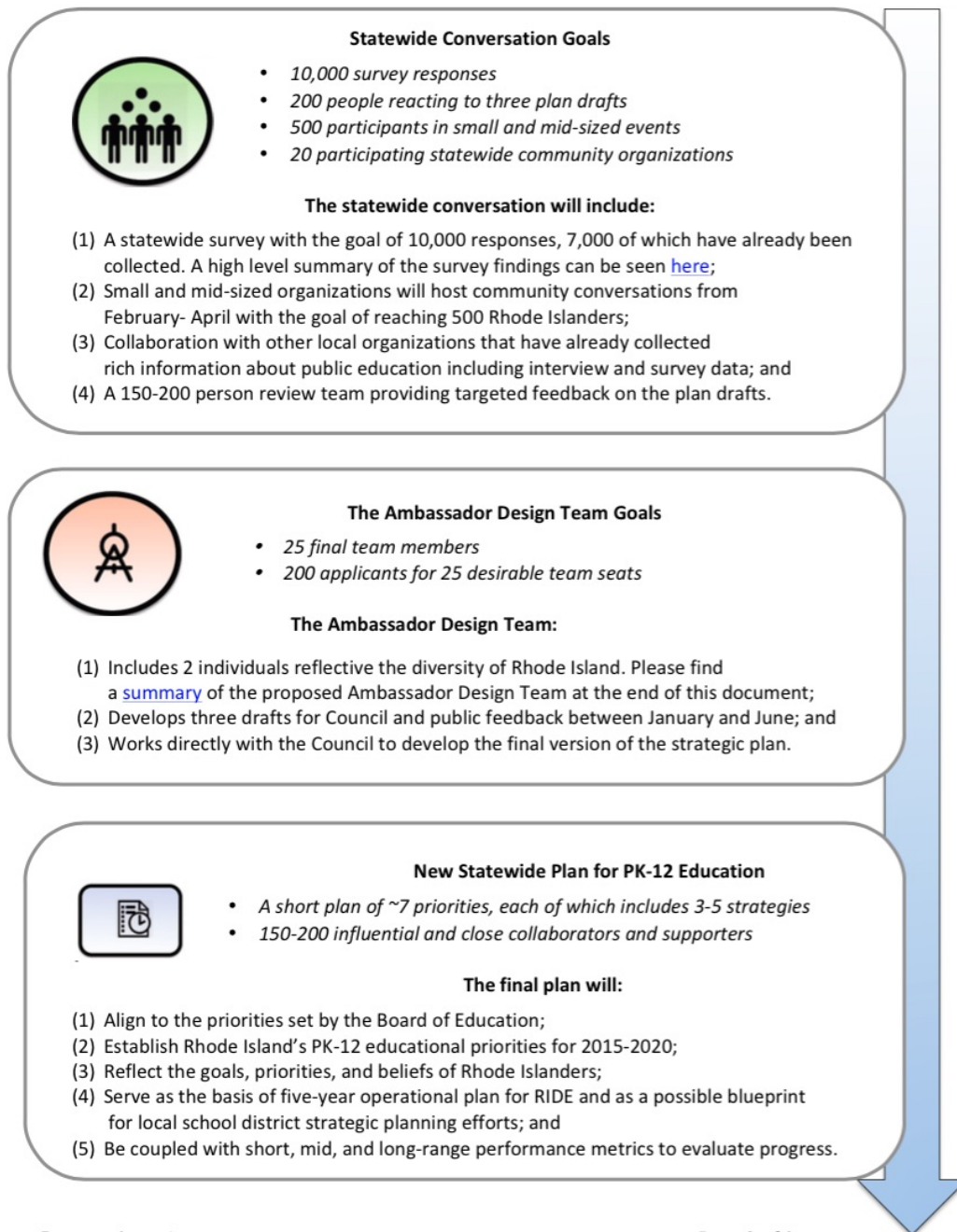
The education department is launching a statewide survey, and will later schedule community discussions, small group discussions and individual interviews.

About a dozen people will be invited to help develop and write the plan. It is expected to be finished in June.

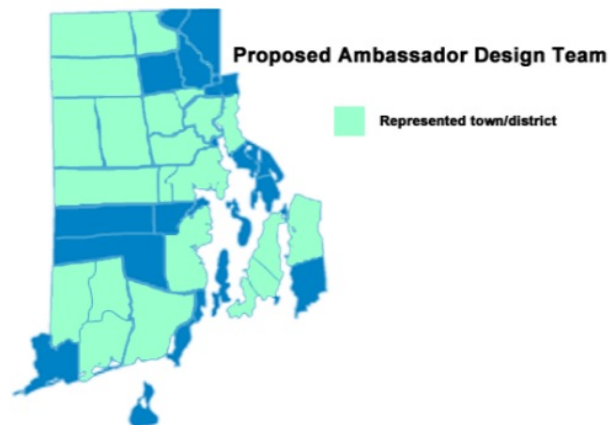
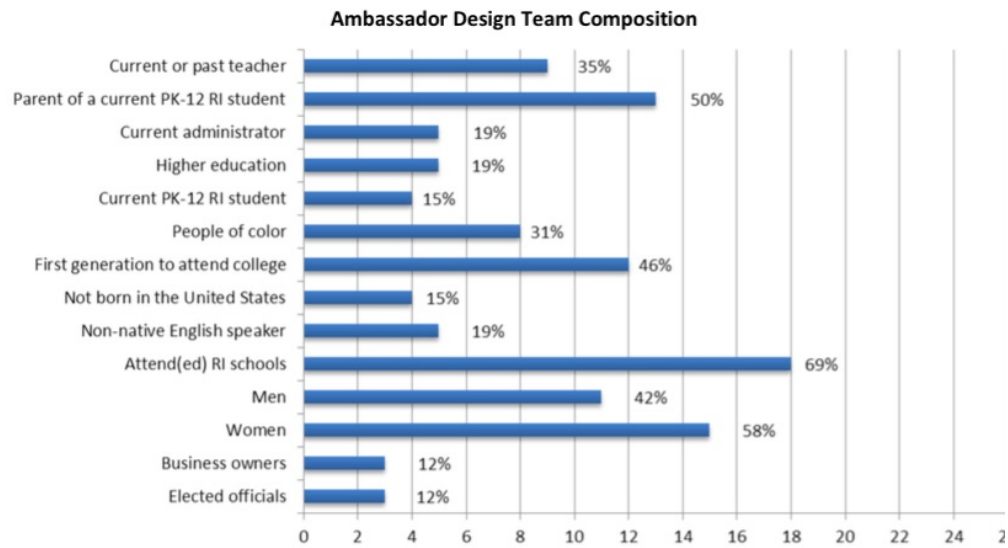
The survey and additional information about the planning process is on the education department's website.

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## Appendix B: Details of Strategic Planning Process



## Appendix C: Ambassador Design Team Make-Up



*Appendix D: ADT Design Party*

ADT Design Party Agenda 12/2/14 V3

<b>Item</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Prep/Notes</b>
Room set up	4:30 – 5:00	<b>KK and AC</b>  <i>Materials</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data posters</li> <li>• Pens for tables</li> <li>• Masking tape</li> </ul> <i>Tasks</i>  Set up registration table  Set up tables  Hang data posters and blank pages next to them  Check A/V  Set up music  Signage (if allowed)
Registration	5:00 – 5:30	<b>PG and KK</b>  <i>Materials</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign-sheet</li> <li>• Folders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Copies of job description</li> <li>○ Agenda</li> <li>○ Brainstorming sheet</li> <li>○ Pair/brainstorming sheet</li> <li>○ Exit ticket</li> <li>○ Release form</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nametags</li> <li>• Identity flags</li> <li>• Markers</li> <li>• Tape</li> </ul> <p>No breaks</p>
Informal welcome	5:15 – 5:30	<p><b>JN/DM and AC</b></p> <p><i>Tasks</i></p> <p>Walk around and greet people, generally make nice</p>
Kick-off	5:30-5:40	<p><b>AC/AC</b></p> <p><i>Materials</i></p> <p>Powerpoint (slide 1)</p> <p><i>Tasks</i></p> <p>AC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set the stage for the moment</li> <li>• Describe the role of the team relative to BOE and RIDE</li> <li>• Communicate enthusiasm and commitment</li> </ul> <p>Take them through packet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agenda</li> <li>• Job description</li> <li>• Card stock</li> <li>• Brainstorming worksheets</li> <li>• Exit ticket</li> <li>• Release form <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Start of public process</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Candidate selection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 10% of candidates</li> <li>○ Everyone is great</li> </ul> </li> </ul>







		<p>taken it)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAKE A 10 MIN. DATA WALK, VIEWING EACH CHART</li> <li>• USE STICKY NOTES TO WRITE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Things that surprise you</li> <li>- Things with which you strongly agree</li> <li>- Additional questions the data raised</li> <li>-</li> <li>- YOU HAVE ONE MINUTE TO QUIETLY RECORD, ON YOUR <u>CARDSTOCK</u>, THE ONE, MOST COMPELLING OBSERVATION OR INSIGHT (YOU WILL BE INTERVIEWED ON THIS LATER)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<i>Powerpoint slide 4</i>	
<b>Activity 2: Micro-interviews</b>	6:00 – 6:15	<b>JN/DM:</b> Instructions  <b>AC:</b> Timer

<p>(Interest in understanding the perspective of others)</p>	<p><i>Powerpoint slide 5</i></p> <p><i>Powerpoint slide 6</i></p>	<p>3 minutes each</p> <p>Instructions/Purpose</p> <p><i>Materials</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pen</i></li> <li>• <i>Cardstock</i></li> <li>• <i>Powerpoint slide</i></li> </ul> <p>Intro to the exercise and the reason we included it tonight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process grounded in genuine sense of empathy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For the most part, <u>we know what we think</u></li> <li>○ <u>Need to focus on what other people think and learn as much as possible from them</u></li> </ul> </li> <li>• We're going to ask you to interview one person in the room to figure out why they have made their insight.</li> <li>• You are going to take 3 minute turns being interviewed/interviewing</li> <li>• <u>Pick a partner</u>, ideally someone with different colored flags than you</li> <li>• You have 1 minute to find a partner</li> </ul> <p>Closure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reactions? HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT WHAT OTHER PEOPLE FELT?</li> <li>- Probably felt uncomfortable because you don't know</li> </ul>
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		<p>the person you're interviewing but we want you to naturally take an inquiry stance and be curious about others opinions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reason we did this was that we <u>tried to model process where our ambassadors will be curious, and empathic.</u></li> <li>- <u>The ambassador design team needs to hold their own opinions while also being curious about and empathic to others opinions.</u></li> </ul>
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<p>Activity 3:</p> <p><b>Brainstorming</b></p> <p>(thinking and dreaming big)</p>	<p>6:15– 6:35</p> <p><i>Powerpoint slide 7</i></p>	<p>Go back to seat</p> <p><b>AC:</b></p> <p>Intro to the exercise and the reason we included it tonight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship to keeping open mind and aspirational view</li> </ul> <p><i>Materials:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 worksheets (yellow and grey with the boxes)</li> </ul> <p><i>Task Instructions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exercise has two stages, both of which are timed</li> <li>Stage 1: We are going to give everyone 3 minutes to come up with 12 responses to a single prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The goal is to fill every box. There is no idea too small, too crazy. Just fill the boxes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Stage 2: You are going to partner up and collectively choose the four ideas you both agree are best. Also timed.</li> </ul> <p>(if there is enough time, ask a few people to share their top idea)</p>
<p><b>Overview of the process</b></p>	<p>6:35 – 6:40</p> <p><i>Powerpoint slide 8</i></p>	<p><b>JN/DM</b></p> <p>Hold January 10th</p>

		<p>Back on the balcony to get a sense of what's happening between Jan and when the plan goes to the Board for adoption</p> <p>Core (writing) vs. Extended (imagination/dreamers) vs. Prototype Response</p>
Questions/Answers	<p>6:40 – 6:50</p> <p><i>Powerpoint slide 9</i></p>	JN/DM/AC
<p>Thanks/Closing/Exit</p> <p>Slips</p>	<p>6:50</p> <p><i>Powerpoint slide 10</i></p>	JN/DM

Supply list:

- (1) Direction signs
- (2) Masking tape
- (3) Markers
- (4) Post it notes
- (5) Name tags, printed
- (6) Name tags, blank
- (7) Name tag flags
- (8) Music list
- (9) Sign in sheet

## Appendix E – Values Prototype

	<p><b>2015-2020 Rhode Island Strategic Plan for PK-12 Education:</b></p> <p><b>Values</b></p> <p><i>Draft produced by the Ambassador Design Team on January 29, 2015</i> <i>Published for feedback February 2 – February 6, 2015</i></p>
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### **Quality**

In our education system, Rhode Islanders value high quality systems/structures of support to ensure the success of all stakeholders.

### **Engaged and Accountable**

In our education system, Rhode Islanders value a process which engages and holds accountable every member of the community to ensure the success of each student.

### **Personalization**

In our educational system, Rhode Islanders value customized learning to maximize the individual potential for every student's success.

### **Equity**

Rhode Islanders value equitable outcomes in the education system including: achievement, funding, resources, programs, facilities, services, instruction, access, and diversity. We believe every student, family, and educator should have access to resources that they need as individuals to place them on equal footing to achieve success.

### **Preparedness**

In our education system, Rhode Islanders value student-centered, 21<sup>st</sup> century programming where students acquire the knowledge and skills that prepare them for excellence/success in college, career, and life!

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### **Support**

In our education system, Rhode Islanders value strong community and family support in order to help students become more confident and contributing members of society.



*Appendix F – Alt/Directors July 2014 Survey*

Over the last four years, which of the following do you think have been roles that RIDE has played in improving public education in the state?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Providing resources and supports to improve district and school capacity	92.86%	13
Setting the minimum acceptable standards of performance for the RI education system	85.71%	12
Establishing the aspirational vision of the RI education system	85.71%	12
Ensuring districts and schools are in compliance with state and federal rules and regulations	85.71%	12
Holding districts and schools accountable through performance management for improving student achievement	71.43%	10
Intervening with programs and schools that are persistently low performing	71.43%	10
Collaborating with the state legislature and board of education to develop education policies	71.43%	10
Fostering innovation among schools and districts	42.86%	6
Forging partnerships among external stakeholders	28.57%	4
Other (please specify)	28.57%	4
Total Respondents: 14		

## Top Responses: A Review of the Past Strategic Priorities

**What strategic priorities have most dramatically impacted the reputation of RIDE?**

*Top 3*

- Educator Quality(8)
- Use of resources wisely (5)
- Tie between
  - Standards (3)
  - Use of Data (3)
  - Graduation Requirements (3)

**What strategic priorities have been most impactful to students, schools, and/or districts?**

*Top 3*

- Educator Quality (7)
- High Standards (7)
- Use of Data (6)

**From your perspective at the broad agency level, what strategic priorities have most dramatically influenced the culture within RIDE over the last four years?**

*Top 3*

- Race to the Top (5)
- Educator Quality(4)
- Use of Data (4)

## Top Responses: Non-Negotiables

### **No matter what happens, RIDE should not stop doing....**

*Top 4*

- Educator Quality(6)
- Setting High Standards (4)
- Holding Schools and Districts Accountable (4)
- Promoting Graduation Standards (3)

### **No matter what happens, RIDE should not start doing....**

*Top 2*

- More Monitoring (2)
- Providing Direct Support or TA (2)

## Appendix G: Rhode Island Diploma System

